



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement of U.S. Disappointment Over Closure of the OSCE Assistance Group in Chechnya

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 23, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me say to begin that my government is deeply disappointed by the recent Russian decision to close the OSCE's Assistance Group in Chechnya. We expect the mission will be allowed to close in an orderly way after completing those activities and projects already planned with the local community and with international partners.

The mandate of this Assistance Group was a key illustration of the OSCE's role in monitoring human rights and promoting economic development. The mission's objective reporting of human rights abuses was vital to the OSCE.

After Russia refused even to discuss negotiating changes to the mandate, which the Assistance Group had operated under since 1995, and then refused to renew it, we worked together with other European partners and Canada to draft a new mandate that would preserve the OSCE's important role, while taking into consideration the concerns expressed by the Russian Federation.

Unfortunately, the Russian side chose not to engage on those ideas.

We regret that Russia was unwilling to work on a new mandate and that, as a result, the Assistance Group will close. We continue to believe that the situation warrants the active and constructive engagement of an OSCE presence in Chechnya to promote human rights and economic development, and to bolster democratic institutions and the rule of law.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to highlight once again the work of Ambassador Inki, the outgoing head of the Assistance Group. His untiring work and dedication to promoting OSCE principals and his respect, above all else, for the human dignity of all people in Chechnya, are a credit not only to him personally, but to this organization as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.